

A PAGE FOR WOMEN AND THE HOME

THE DAILY SHORT STORY

The Newlyweds' Tragedy.
BY LOUISE OLIVER.
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EVERY evening at 5:30 when Bob turned the corner from the station his eyes eagerly sought the veranda of his four-months' old bungalow upon which Clara, his four months' old bride, just as eagerly waited his return. Never yet from showery April until scorching July had she failed to meet her adoring husband, and it was with vague misgiving that he saw no sign of his pretty little wife behind the petunia-filled veranda boxes one sweltering evening when he came home from town.

Just inside the door, however, as he came nearer, he caught a glimpse of a checked kitchen apron and, behind it, Clara.

"What's up?" he demanded anxiously. For this was a variant from the dainty frocks she was accustomed to wear.

"Lizzie's gone!"

"Well, did you ever!"

"And I burned the steak!" Proof of the fact was strong in the atmosphere of the hall.

"And the mayonnaise won't get stiff and the asparagus won't get soft and—everything's spoiled!" Clara sobbed hysterically.

Bob pulled her hot, tousled little head to his breast. "It's all right, little maid, don't you care! We'll throw the old stuff out. Let's make some lemonade and have a sandwich. What's wrong with Lizzie?"

"I don't know. Somebody sick or dead or something. I was out and when I got back she was gone. Left word with Mrs. Smith next door. Some one pushed it."

"Rotten luck! Well, I'll try to get somebody tomorrow. We'll both get dressed and then we'll get our picnic together."

"Bobby dear, you're an angel. I was afraid you'd be cross because I spoiled the things."

"Never!" declared Bobby fervently.

And so closed the first chapter of the Brixton tragedy.

That night, or rather at 2 a. m. next morning, Clara shook Bob. "Bobby, wake up! Oh, please, Bobby, wake up. There's somebody down stairs. I hear them walking."

"Oh, it's next door," answered her husband sleepily. "You're just hearing things." And then he turned over.

Clara shook him determinedly. "Bob, I hear it again. There! What

is that?"

"Margie, I don't believe that there is as much excitement in the white house on the night when the returns of the presidential election come in as there is behind the scenes the opening night."

Every actor is excited to a high pitch and the strain is tremendous. In the first place no man or woman has yet been found who can say absolutely this or that will be a successful play. It is up to the audience to give the verdict.

I have seen plays that at rehearsal have seemed destined to be great successes prove "flivvers" and plays that everyone in the company was dubious about score the greatest success when presented.

"The One He Chose" was only a moderate success as a play, but Ernest Lawton, Mary Madden and myself received much praise; and why should we not? We were practically telling our own story. Lawton was tired of his old love and wanted to get on with the new. The old love still clung and brought up memories of the past.

The new love promised youth and adoration to the man and the old love could only point backward to the very things of which he was tired.

"I will never forget Mary Madden's big scene with Ernest Lawton—the scene in which she accused him of being in love with Elga. It was superb."

"There was a speech in which she said, 'Yes, I know she has what I gave in the years ago, and she has the beauty which was mine before you blotted it with your unkindness and neglect.'"

"Look at her as she stands there beside the fountain—is she any more beautiful than was I when you first met me and made me worship you as

she is learning to worship you now?"

"Although I was not supposed to hear this conversation, I trembled and so did Ernest Lawton."

"Ernest Lawton answered her speech 'Why Gertrude don't you know that Elga is almost a child, the most unsophisticated young girl I have ever known?'"

"The manner of his saying it left nothing to the imagination of the audience as to the great fascination that an unsophistication had for him."

"This scene was commented on in more than one morning paper as being the most subtle in the manner of speaking to one thing and conveying to the audience another that was ever put behind the footlights."

"At the time I did not know that all Broadway buzzed over that line in the theatrical daily. I just thought it was a tribute to us as actors."

"That night Mary Madden went to sup with the manager of the company. We—Ernest Lawton and I—passed her in the hallway as we went out by the stage door."

"It was a great success, Mary," he said, "and you did the best piece of acting you ever did in your life."

"I expect they will say so," she said wearily, "but I don't think the verdict will pay me for all I have put in the part."

"Ernest Lawton looked at me quickly. Later I knew the significance of that look. At the time I knew nothing except that I was the happiest girl in the world, and with the white roses that Ernest had sent me I was going out to eat the first real meal I had had for two days."

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did I tell you?" For this time something did rattle in the lower regions and Bob sat up in bed.

"I think it's the bench on the back veranda!" whispered Clara. "Some one pushed it."

And then, when her better half was out of bed and heading for the stairs with an electric flash and an automatic gun, she began to plead for him not to go.

"You'll get killed, dearie. Oh, please don't go. Let them take the forks and spoons. Oh, Bob, stay here!"

And so, accompanied by walls and

entrances enough to make a regiment nervous, Bob descended the stairs and turned on the lights in the downstairs rooms even unto the kitchen, and found—nothing! Then, hearing something outside he opened the back door.

The bench had been pulled across the doorway and on the bench was a basket. And in the basket was something with a good pair of lungs, whatever else it possessed.

Bob looked around and saw nobody. Then, gingerly lifting the basket, he closed and locked the door, turned out the lights, mounted the stairs, and laid the basket on the bed.

"Here's your burglar," he said grimly.

Clara looked aghast. The lungs were still working. "A baby!" she gasped. "What in the world—?"

Curiously and bewildered, she pulled back the cover and behold—two of them!

"Oh, Bob, did you ever see anything so cute?" she purred. For the crying stopped and there was a violent sound of snacking, as two fists tried their best to get into diminutive mouths.

"Cut! Good heavens! About, cute as if somebody had wished a menagerie on us to take care of." Bob was pulling on his clothes.

"What are you doing? Are you going out?"

"You bet I am—to the police station. If that's closed I'll keep on to the river."

"Bob! Don't be silly! They can't help it, poor little mites. Come and look at them, at their dear little bald heads. Oh, can't we keep them until somebody comes for them?"

"Don't lose your senses, Clara!"



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"Bob, Bob, there isn't a public institution near us for miles except the Old Men's Home, and the only police department consists of old Charlie Hutchison, who is sick with asthma, and the town council and the burgess are on a fishing trip. What can you do?"

Bob glared. "I'll bust somebody's head if I find out who played this trick on us."

But Clara was lifting the twins out by this time and examining basket and clothes for signs of identification. "The dears!" she cooed. "And listen, Bobby, they're hungry. Go down to the ice box and get some milk. Warm it, not too hot, and bring it up—and a spoon."

Inwardly raging, Bob obeyed. But the spoon didn't work. The babies would have none of it. The yelling commenced again and Bob declared he would walk a tight rope to China if it would bring a few minutes of peaceful silence.

"Then go to the drug store, dear, for a couple of bottles. That's what they want. And ring the Smiths' doorbell and borrow more milk. Aren't they darlings, Bobby?"

"No," snarled he. "And I'll be dashed if I keep those kids in this house after the first streak of dawn."

And thus ended chapter two of Bob's tragedy.

But the Brixton's kept the babies! That is, for some time longer than the limit set by Bob. It was this way:

Next day the phone rang and in answer to Clara's tired "Hello," some one informed her that a certain Lizzie Obrien had been hurt by an automobile and asked to see her at St. Stephen's hospital.

"I can't go!" answered she, "but I'll send my husband as soon as possible." So Bob went and found Lizzie, the cook, in bed, plastered and bandaged.

"Well, Lizzie, what's all this about?"

"I'll tell you, Mr. Brixton. But, first, how's the babies? Are they safe?"

"Babies!" Bob jumped. "What do you know about them? Quick!"

"Well, Mr. Brixton, Molly, my youngest sister, married Dan O'Grady, a big good-for-nothing, bad cess to him!"

"Yes, yes. Go on!"

"And him and Molly couldn't get along. The twins only seemed to make things worse. So Dan up and leaves Molly and his folks tried to get the twins and Molly found it out and sent for me to get them till things were settled. And here I up and get run over and Molly didn't know it and last night she brought them herself and put them on the porch under my window, not knowing I was here. She was afraid if she'd ring the bell you wouldn't let them in."

Bob mopped his face. "Yes, Go on!"

"Today," Lizzie went on, "the case is to come before the squire and it's to be settled who's to get the darlins. I thought I'd tell you so you wouldn't worry."

But this evening when Bob had jubilantly told Clara the good news he opened the evening paper and read:

"In the disagreement case between Dan and Molly O'Grady, in which the latter charges desertion and both are trying to get custody of twin boys, Alderman McManus decided that for the time being the children should stay where they are."

End of chapter three!

Then they couldn't get a girl and Clara got sick. Bob had to stay home from the office two days and got no sleep nights.

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That takes us up to chapter ten.

But one long-to-be-remembered day, Lizzie came limping in. Never was a sight so beautiful to the Newlyweds' eyes. And with Lizzie came the welcome news that Molly was to get the "kids."

Bob's vacation began next day and he and Clara stole away to the seashore for a second honeymoon.

"The next time you hear burglars, dearie," teased Bog, "don't wake me up. Let them take the whole house with us in it."

"Indeed I shall, Bobby!" smiled Clara. "But," a little wistfully, "they were cute little darlings!"

And this ends the book.

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